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THE HOUSE REJECTS FUNDS TO PRODUCE CHEMICAL WEAPON

OPPOSITION IS WIDESPREAD

Vote to Continue Moratorium
Is First Setback to Reagan
Military Spending Bill

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, July 22 — The House of Representatives voted by a substantial margin today to halt the Reagan Administration's plan to start making a new form of chemical weapon.

The House action, led by Representative Clement J. Zablocki, chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, was the first significant setback to the Administration's \$177 billion Defense Authorization Bill for the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1. The vote was 251 to 159.

The Administration had proposed to begin making what are known as binary chemical weapons, which contain two individually harmless chemicals that, when combined, form a deadly nerve gas.

The amount of money involved, \$54 million, was relatively small but would have paid for the initial production of the weapons at a plant in the home state of Representative Ed Bethune, Republican of Arkansas. Nevertheless, Mr. Bethune supported the Zablocki amendment, and called the chemical weapons unnecessary and ineffective and said they are opposed by America's allies in Europe.

In May, the Senate narrowly approved production of the binary chemical weapons in a 49-to-45 vote. Thus, the issue must be settled in a later conference between members of the two houses. Given the size of the House margin in contrast with that in the Senate, the House would appear to have the upper hand.

Moratorium Begun by Nixon

If the House prevails, Congress would then have continued a moratorium on the production of chemical weapons or-

dered by President Nixon in 1969. The United States has been negotiating with the Soviet Union since 1976 on a treaty to limit the use and production of the weapons. The House today called on the Administration to continue those negotiations.

The Army has contended that binary chemical weapons would be safer to make, store, move and use than the current unitary weapons that contain poison gas.

The Reagan Administration has placed considerable priority on resuming the manufacturing of chemical weapons, contending that they are necessary to deter what intelligence agencies have reported to be the Soviet Union's large chemical warfare capability. The Administration has said it has evidence of Soviet use of chemical weapons in Afghanistan and Indochina.

The Administration's doctrine was laid out in the five-year Defense Guidance signed by Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger. It says: "The United States policy is to deter enemy first use of chemical and biological weapons against United States and allied forces and to terminate such use on terms favorable to the United States at the lowest possible level should deterrence fail."

"However," the classified document says, "the United States will not produce or stockpile offensive biological warfare systems."

Deterrence is to be achieved, the guidance says, "by developing the capability both to retaliate in kind to enemy first use of chemical warfare and sustain military operations in a contaminated environment."

The armed forces were directed to modernize that retaliatory capability and to dispose of obsolete chemical weapons.

Defensive Chemicals Approved

In the three-hour debate today, Mr. Zablocki, Democrat of Michigan, contended that "we have an adequate stockpile and should pursue serious arms control negotiations." He argued that the Administration's proposal "does not contribute to United States national security but rather undermines it."

Representative Millicent Fenwick, Republican of New Jersey, supported Mr. Zablocki, asserting, "It is a disgrace to our country even to think that we could spend money, when we don't even know where to find it for children's lunches, for poison gas."

Mr. Zablocki's amendment to delete the \$54 million was revised on a motion by Mr. Bethune, who urged the House to insist that no funds should be spent to produce the binary weapons or on facilities to make them. But the remainder of the \$705 million proposed authorization for chemical warfare, mostly for defensive equipment, was passed.

The Administration tried to persuade the House to support its plan with a letter from the President's national security adviser, William Clark, urging that a substitute amendment be adopted to permit the Army to dispose of one unitary weapon for each binary weapon it received. That was defeated, 225 to 192.

Among the leading advocates of proceeding with production of the binary chemical weapons was Representative William L. Dickinson, Republican of Alabama and the senior minority member of the Armed Services Committee.

He contended that "it is easy to play on people's emotions" on the issue of chemical weapons but that the Congress should dismiss the effect of public opinion on the Soviet Union. If Soviet forces invade Europe, he said with sarcasm: "We'll hit 'em with a public opinion poll. That'll stop them in their tracks."